

## 8.4 RECOMMENDED MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Suitable and adequate habitat is a critical element in the ecology and productivity of estuarine systems. Degradation or improvement in one aspect of habitat may have a corresponding impact on water quality. Maintenance and improvement of suitable estuarine habitat and water quality is critical to successfully recovering and sustaining bay scallop stocks.

### 8.4.1 HABITAT

Habitat protection, conservation, and restoration are essential to accomplish the goal and objectives of this plan. The MFC, North Carolina Coastal Resources Commission (CRC), and EMC should adopt rules to protect critical habitats for bay scallops as outlined in the CHPP. The DENR should develop a strategy to fully support CHPP implementation with needed staff and funding. The MFC and DMF should continue to comment on activities that may impact aquatic habitats and work with permitting agencies to minimize impacts and promote restoration and research. Research must be conducted to investigate the impacts of trawling on various habitats, including SAV.

A strategy should be developed and adopted by the MFC and DENR to accomplish the actions outlined below. These actions address Objectives 2 and 4 of the Bay Scallop FMP. Actions 1, 8, 9, 11, 12, and 15 can be implemented by DMF/MFC. The other actions would need to be implemented through the cooperative efforts of the N.C. General Assembly and/or several divisions within the DENR. The involvement of federal agencies and increased funding (state and federal) may be necessary to accomplish these actions.

#### Strategic Habitat Areas

1. Identify and delineate Strategic Habitat Areas that will enhance protection of bay scallop.

#### Submerged Aquatic Vegetation

2. Completely map all SAV habitat in North Carolina.
3. Remap SAV habitat in Core and Bogue sounds and assess changes in distribution and abundance over time.
4. Restore historical distribution and acreage of SAV.
5. Aggressively reduce point and non-point nutrient and sediment loading in estuarine waters, to levels that will sustain SAV habitat, using regulatory and non-regulatory actions.
6. Evaluate dock criteria siting and construction to determine if existing requirements are adequate for SAV survival and growth, and modify if necessary.
7. Develop and implement a comprehensive coastal marina and dock management plan and policy to minimize impacts to SAV and other fish habitats.